



Teammates rush towards man of the match Manuel Neuer after Germany defeated Italy in a penalty shootout in their Euro 2016 quarterfinal encounter in Bordeaux on Saturday, thanks to some brilliant saves from the Bayern Munich goalkeeper.

No regrets, says tearful Buffon

AFP, Bordeaux



Tears rolled down the cheeks of Gianluigi Buffon but the legendary Italy 'keeper said there were "no regrets" despite the Azzurri missing a golden chance to beat Germany to a Euro 2016 semi-final spot on Saturday.

"The tears are for my disappointment. It was a magical experience that revived something in all of us and our fans, but it's come to an end," an emotional Buffon told media after Germany's 6-5 penalty shoot-out win in Bordeaux.

Italy spurned the chance to clinch their last four spot when Graziano Pelle hit a pitiful effort wide of the post as the Germans misfired.

That, and other misses, proved costly for Italy later on, as the penalty shootout went to a total of 18 kicks.

After Manchester United defender Matteo Darmian saw his shot saved by Manuel Neuer, Jonas Hector stepped up to beat Buffon and send World Cup holders Germany into a semi-final against France or Iceland, who play on Sunday.

"It's a shame. When a team [Germany] misses three penalties out of five and you still don't manage to win it becomes complicated," said Buffon.

"Sometimes it goes your way, other times it doesn't. But that's all a big part of sport, and you have to accept it."

"We wanted to leave this tournament without any regrets and that's what we will do. We made our people proud and for this we can't be sorry."

It was Antonio Conte's last game as coach ahead of his move to Premier League giants Chelsea.

But Juventus goalkeeper Buffon, 38, indicated the defeat would not hasten his international retirement.

"Personally, I'm fine. I still get fired up by these games and I feel that I've still got something to give to this squad," said Buffon, who believes there is also a big future for Italy's young team.

"I'm happy and proud to have worked alongside this squad. They (Germany) deserved victory more than us, but this game will serve the lads well."

PHOTO: AFP

Loew, Neuer praise youth for stepping up

REUTERS, Bordeaux

Germany coach Joachim Loew and goalkeeper Manuel Neuer praised the team's less experienced players for stepping up to convert in their dramatic penalty shootout against Italy, firing the world champions into the Euro 2016 final four.

Something had to give in Bordeaux as Saturday's 1-1 draw meandered to penalties, with Italy's immense 4-0 record against their rivals in tournament knockout matches being jeopardized by Germany's astonishing five consecutive shootout triumphs.

While experienced hands Thomas Mueller, Mesut Ozil and captain Bastian Schweinsteiger missed their spotkicks, inexperienced Joshua Kimmich, who only made his national team debut in May, found the net in sudden death.

Minutes later Jonas Hector, with

just 19 international caps to his name, converted the decisive penalty to give Germany a 6-5 shootout victory.

"Usually, we have good penalty takers, although they haven't scored today," Loew told journalists. "The experienced players missed and the youngsters scored."

"It was great that youngsters like Kimmich and Hector, in their first major tournament, kept their nerves on such a stage. Takers one to five were clear quite quickly," Loew added. "Then you have to let players choose depending on their feelings."

"We saw how much pressure was on their shoulders," added Neuer. "So it took a lot of courage for [Hector] to step up."

Germany took the lead through Ozil's 65th-minute opener, but Italy equalised 13 minutes later when Leonardo Bonucci scored from the spot after Jerome Boateng's handball.

They hadn't missed a penalty in a

shootout since 1982 before Saturday's drama, but Mueller and Ozil both failed to find the net after Toni Kroos scored.

Bonucci missed his penalty - Italy's fifth - but Schweinsteiger blazed over as the exchange went to sudden death.

When Matteo Darmian's effort was saved by Neuer, Hector, participating in his first-ever shootout, stepped up to keep Germany's shootout record alive.

"I can't describe the feeling," Hector told German television. "I took my heart in my hands and just wanted to score."

While Germany extend their impressive shootout record, Italy have now lost six of their nine shootouts in major tournaments.

"I didn't know about the history ... about the statistics and our historic success," said Neuer.

"You can't just assume that if it's penalties, Germany advance."

Victory sets Germany up for a semi-final against either France or Iceland in Marseille on Thursday.

Argentines plead for Messi's return

REUTERS, Buenos Aires



Hundreds of Argentines protested in the pouring rain on Saturday, demanding that soccer star Lionel Messi return to Argentina's national team after he unexpectedly quit following a loss in the regional Copa America final.

Messi, a five-time World Player of the Year, has played in three Copa America finals, in 2007, 2015, and 2016, as well as in the 2014 World Cup final, losing every time. During the finals match with rival Chile last week, he missed Argentina's opening penalty in the shootout after the game ended 0-0 and was in tears sitting near the team dugout.

"I think this is it. It's over for me on the team," he told reporters after the match.

Nevertheless, Argentines, at the urging of public figures such as President Mauricio Macri and Argentine soccer great Diego Maradona, gathered Saturday evening around the Obelisco, a monument on one of Buenos Aires' central

avenues where fans traditionally celebrate sporting victories.

Waving banners that lauded Messi in superlative terms, they begged the star to don the national squad's iconic blue and white stripes once again.

"There's a saying that there's a Messi every 500 million years and we're enjoying that, so we have to be grateful that we live in this time," said fan Santiago Bordero.

After Argentina's loss against Chile in the final, Messi returned to Argentina and spent time in his native city of Rosario. He then went to the Bahamas on vacation, while many Argentines awaited further statements from the star.

"He has to come back - excuse the emotion - but it's what I feel," said Juan Alberto Salas. "For me, he's exceptional, a god."

An Argentinian newspaper reports that Messi has been moved by the pleas from fans since his retirement and has suggested that he will come back to the national team. A specific date was not mentioned, but they said he will return in time for the 2018 World Cup in

Gatlin, Gay expect Bolt to be ready

REUTERS, Eugene

Justin Gatlin fully expects ailing world record holder Usain Bolt to be ready for another 100 metres showdown at the Rio Olympics.

"We're going to see his face in Rio one way or another," American world silver medalist Gatlin said at the U.S. Olympic trials on Saturday.

"Crazy stuff always happens in an Olympic year," said Gatlin, who narrowly lost to Bolt in the 2015 world championships 100m.

"The mystery of the Olympics is in the air. It is full of dreams and sometimes dreams don't come true. But come on, man, he's Usain."

Six-times Olympic champion Bolt pulled out of the Jamaican trials on Friday just before the 100m final with a hamstring injury.

He said he expected to be in form by the Games.

"It's a tradition," former U.S. world champion Tyson Gay said of Bolt bouncing back from previous injuries.

Gomez out, 2 others in doubt

AFP, Evian

Germany's Mario Gomez has been ruled out of the rest of Euro 2016 through injury while Sami Khedira and captain Bastian Schweinsteiger are doubts for Thursday's semi-final, the German Football Federation (DFB) said Sunday.

Gomez underwent a scan on Sunday that showed the striker suffered a torn thigh muscle in the quarter-final victory over Italy and he can play no further part in the tournament, the DFB said.

Juventus midfielder Khedira has a partially torn groin muscle and Manchester United's Schweinsteiger sprained a knee ligament in the penalty shootout win over the Italians on Saturday.

"It is currently in doubt whether Schweinsteiger and Khedira will be able to take any part on Thursday in Marseille or in a possible final in Saint Denis on Sunday," the DFB said in a statement.

Both are receiving intensive medical treatment.

Dejected Conte full of praise for Italy

REUTERS, Bordeaux

Antonio Conte bowed out as Italy coach on Saturday after a Euro 2016 shootout defeat by Germany sounding almost broken-hearted that he was leaving behind a "fantastic" group of players.

He heaped praise on them for their performance against the Germans which ended in a 6-5 quarter-final loss on penalties after the game finished 1-1 following extra time.

"It was a tough match from every perspective. We showed heart to overcome the obstacles," Conte told a news conference.

"It is a shame to go out in this fashion because it is a lottery. However a top side go through and I think they are the best side in the world from every angle."

"We believed we could do it, obviously afterwards in the dressing room we were hugely disappointed."

Conte now takes the reins at Premier League side Chelsea after two years at the helm of the Italian national side.

While his Azzurri squad was not filled with the array of talent available in previous campaigns, they surpassed expectations by beating fancied Belgium, knocking out holders Spain and on Saturday taking their old rivals down to the wire.

After a Germany win seemed inevitable when Mesut Ozil fired them into the lead in the 65th minute, the Italians stepped up the

pressure and equalised 13 minutes later with a penalty and they could even have snatched a winner.

"Football can bring you joy and can leave a bad taste in your mouth. These players will always have a place in my heart," Conte added. "The players have left a significant mark on this tournament and shown that with desire and hard work, you can achieve something."

The dapper Conte was in reflective mood as he contemplated the end of his tenure with the national team. He said he believed his greatest victory was to have worked with this squad and staff.

"These have been fantastic years for me. We really created a magical family atmosphere and it's a shame it all ends tonight."

He believed this Italy side could go on to greater things.

"In this process we have really come together, it will leave a lasting mark, a number of these players can only progress."

"I hope we can leave a love for the national team, love for the shirt, and I hope this message can be conveyed despite our elimination from the tournament."

He will be succeeded by Giampiero Ventura, lately of Torino.

"My future is now Chelsea. To be honest I would have liked not to have a holiday because that would have meant going forward in this tournament then going forward to this big adventure," bemoaned Conte.



PSG sign Krychowiak

REUTERS, Psg

Poland midfielder Grzegorz Krychowiak has signed a five-year contract with Paris St Germain, the French champions said in a statement on Sunday.

The 26-year-old Krychowiak, a member of the Poland team who were eliminated by Portugal in the quarter-finals of the European Championship in France, joins from Spanish side Sevilla, where he played under the guidance of Unai Emery who has now been appointed PSG coach.

Chelsea rope in Batshuayi

AFP, London

Marseille's Belgian international striker Michy Batshuayi has signed a five-year contract with Chelsea, the Premier League club confirmed on Sunday.

A 6.5-million-euro signing from Standard Liege in 2014, Batshuayi scored 17 goals in Ligue 1 last season, and 23 times in all competitions.

The 22-year-old was part of the Belgium squad at Euro 2016 and netted with his first touch on his tournament debut, converting a cross from his new Chelsea team-mate Eden Hazard in a 4-0 win over Hungary.



Argentine fans gathered in front of the Obelisk in Buenos Aires on Saturday night to show support for Lionel Messi, urging him to come back to the national side. The Argentine flag at the bottom reads: "I believe in Messi!"

PHOTO: REUTERS

Phelps wins final race

REUTERS, Omaha



Michael Phelps gave the home fans one last thrill when he touched first in the 100 metres butterfly at the U.S. Olympic trials on Saturday in his final race in an American pool.

The world record holder and three-time Olympic champion in the event, Phelps would not be denied a winning sendoff as he charged to the wall to the roar of a capacity crowd in a time of exactly 51 seconds, just ahead of Tom Shields.

With his trials over, Phelps heads to Rio

for what he says will be his fifth and final Games qualified in three events; the 100 and 200 butterfly and 200 individual medley, ready to add to his staggering record total of 22 Olympic medals.

Phelps began his final U.S. race from an unfamiliar spot, lining up in lane seven. But everything else was vintage Phelps as he powered into the lead over the final 50 metres.

When he hit the wall, the 31-year-old immediately turned and looked up at the clock, clenching his fist and punching the water underscoring how much the win meant.

As he climbed out of the pool the crowd stood and cheered Phelps, who raised both hands in the air, soaking up the moment.